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Youths Held In Burning Of Crosses

NEW PORT RICHEY: Fla., Jan. 6 (AP)—Schoolmates of Thomas Crittenden, who lost a leg in a car wreck, stood accused today of hurling burning crosses on to the lawns of Crittenden's neighbors in an apparent reprisal to a poisonous letter that said: "Sad he survived."

Willa Jean Crittenden, the Gulf High School football star's widowed mother, found the note when she returned from the hospital where her son's left leg was amputated. He was hurt when his car crashed into a tree Christmas morning.

"We are sorry he survived," the note read, "for eventually he's going to kill an innocent with his damn fool driving. Nuff said. Lucky it was just him and not a car full of innocents or a Floramar child."

Mrs. Crittenden said the message was printed on the margin of a newspaper picture of her 18-year-old son's wrecked car. She said the note apparently came from a neighbor. Early Sunday, police said, 16 or 17 cars full of youths raced up and down the street on which the Crittendens live. They hurled gasoline-soaked wooden crosses about 18 inches high onto lawns of homes in the neighborhood.

Three girls and six boys were charged with unlawful assembly. Deputy John Kirkpatrick said some of those arrested were football players and cheerleaders at Gulf High School.

"None of the kids openly admitted setting any fires," Kirkpatrick said. But they said they were there because of the sadistic letter that Mrs. Crittenden got about her son."